

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting

June 7, 2010

Well, I just completed a meeting with the Cabinet that is directly in charge of dealing with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. From the beginning, we activated 15 agencies for what is now the largest national response ever to an environmental disaster. And what we wanted to do was make sure that every agency was coordinating and that there was clarity about how we're going to proceed in the coming months.

Now, we have gotten reports that have been confirmed by our independent scientists that the top hat mechanism that was put in place is beginning to capture some of the oil. We are still trying to get a better determination as to how much it's capturing, and we are pushing BP very hard to make sure that all the facilities are available so that as the oil is being captured, it's also being separated properly, that there are receptacles for that oil to go, that we have thought through contingencies in case there is an emergency or a hurricane so that these mechanisms are not disrupted, and that there's a lot of redundancy built in.

But here's what we know: Even if we are successful in containing some or much of this oil, we are not going to get this problem completely solved until we actually have the relief well completed, and that is going to take a couple of more months. We also know that there's already a lot of oil that's been released and that there is going to be more oil released no matter how successful this containment effort is. And that's why it's so important for us to continue to put every asset that we have—boom, skimmers, vessels, hiring local folks and local fishermen with their facilities, equipping them with skimmers—getting every asset that we have out there to make sure that we are minimizing the amount of oil that is actually coming to shore.

Now, there are a number of other issues that were raised during this meeting that I just want to touch on. Number one, when I was down in the Gulf on Friday, meeting with fishermen and small-business owners, what is clear is that the economic impact of this disaster is going to be substantial and it is going to be ongoing. And as I said on Friday—and I want to repeat—I do not want to see BP nickel-and-dime these businesses that are having a very tough time.

Now, we've got the SBA in there helping to provide bridge loans, and we've got the Department of Commerce helping businesses to prepare and document the damages that they're experiencing. But what we also need is BP being quick and responsive to the needs of these local communities. We have individuals who have been assigned specifically to ride herd on BP, to make sure that that's happening. We want the people who are in charge of BP's claims process to be meeting with us on a regular basis. But we are going to insist that that money flows quickly, in a timely basis, so that you don't have a shrimp processor or a fisherman who's going out of business before BP finally makes up its mind as to whether or not it's going to pay out. And that's going to be one of our top priorities, because we know that no matter how successful we are over the next few weeks in some of the containment efforts, the damages are still going to be there.

The second thing we talked about quite a bit is the issue of the health of workers who are out there dealing with this spill. So far, we have seen that onshore, we are not seeing huge elevations in toxins in the air or in the water. But that may not be the case out where people are actually doing the work. And we've got to make sure that we are providing all the

protections that are necessary. We've put processes in place to make sure that workers out there are getting the equipment and the training they need to protect themselves and their health. But this is something that we're going to have to continue to monitor, because there are a lot of workers out there, and increasingly, we're starting to get individuals who may not be experienced in oil cleanup, because we're trying to get an all-hands-on-deck process. We've got to make sure that they are protected.

Obviously, we're also monitoring very carefully the impact to people who are not working out there, and that's where the Environmental Protection Agency is doing constant monitoring of the air and the water quality. And we are also doing testing on the seafood to make sure that toxins aren't being introduced into the overall population.

A couple of other points I just want to make. Dr. Lubchenco of NOAA reported on convening a scientific conference to make sure that on issues like the plume that's been reported in the news and other questions about how large is this, what kind of damage do we anticipate, et cetera, that we have full transparency, that the information is out there, that it's subject to scientific review so that nobody has any surprises.

And what we're going to continue to strive for is complete transparency in real time so that as we get information, the public as a whole gets information, academics, scientists, researchers get this information in what is going to be a fluid and evolving process.

Let me just make one final point, and I think this was something that was emphasized by everybody here, and it's something that I want to say to the American people. This will be contained. It may take some time, and it's going to take a whole lot of effort. There is going to be damage done to the Gulf Coast, and there is going to be economic damages that we've got to make sure BP is responsible for and compensates people for.

But the one thing I'm absolutely confident about is that, as we have before, we will get through this crisis. And it—one of the things that I wanted to make sure we understand is that not only are we going to control the damages to the Gulf Coast, but we want to actually use this as an opportunity to reexamine and work with States and local communities to restore the coast in ways that actually enhance the livelihoods and the quality of life for people in that area.

It's going to take some time. It's not going to be easy. But this is a resilient ecosystem. These are resilient people down on the Gulf Coast. I had a chance to talk to them, and they've gone through all kinds of stuff over the last 50, 100 years, and they bounce back. And they're going to bounce back this time. They're going to need help from the entire country. They're going to need constant, vigilant attention from this administration. That's what they're going to get.

But we are going to be—we are confident that not only are we going to be able to get past this immediate crisis, but we're going to be focusing our attention on making sure that the coast fully recovers and that eventually it comes back even stronger than it was before this crisis.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:08 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

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